

Questioning to Increase Response Rates

Answering a question occupies a student's working memory. Thus, asking questions elicits a student's attention. The only problem with this generalization is that once a student is called on to answer a question, the other students in class may disengage and focus on something else. Consequently, if questioning activities are used to capture students' attention, they must increase the number of students who answer each question. A teacher can use a number of activities to increase response rates. Here we present a more in-depth look at questioning strategies.

1. Call on Students Randomly

Calling only on students who raise their hands is an ineffective practice because typically only a small number of students volunteer to answer teacher-posed questions. This creates an environment in which students know that once a question is asked, they can simply relax because only those who raise their hands are responsible for the answer. Another pattern that decreases response rates is for the teacher to typically call on only a select group of students. Again, this pattern signals to the students who are not typically called on that they do not have to attend when a question is asked.

In contrast, calling on students in an obviously random manner can increase response rates in that all students have to at least think about the answer even though they might not actually be called on. Some strategies for calling on students randomly are drawing names out of a hat, writing students' names on tongue depressors that are kept stored in a jar, and using technology available with an interactive Whiteboard system. Regardless of which method a teacher uses, if students know that a teacher will call on any student at random after asking a question, they are more likely to give attention to classroom lessons.

2. Paired Response

One easy way to increase the response rate among students is to use *paired response*. With this strategy, the teacher organizes students into pairs. When a question is asked, the pairs are first given time to confer, which allows all students to be engaged in answering the question. The group time to collaborate and prepare an answer is critical, as it can set students up for success. When a pair is randomly called on, the teacher can ask one of the students to verbalize the answer, the students can decide who will act as the speaker, or each student can contribute part of the answer.

3. Wait Time

Wait Time refers to pausing at strategic points during questioning. Waiting before calling on students allows them to process the question and encourages them to think through their answers instead of impulsively responding. To serve this purpose, the teacher explains ahead of time to the students that once a question is asked there will be time allotted for thinking through their answers - no one will be called on during this time. The amount of time a teacher waits is a function of the complexity and type of question. Stated differently, a teacher can use less time after asking a straightforward question with one correct response and more wait time with asking a complex or open-ended question that requires interpretation.

4. Response Chaining

Response Chaining involves linking or “chaining” students’ responses. The teacher begins by asking a question, to which one student responds. Other students are then asked to respond to that student’s response. When a student contends that a previous student’s answer was partially correct, the teacher asks him or her to explain why it is correct or add information to the first student’s answer. When a student contends that a previous student’s response was incorrect, he or she is asked to provide the correct answer.

If chaining is used with open-ended questions that require extended responses, the pattern is a bit different. Instead of first stating whether the answer was correct, partially correct, or incorrect, a student would paraphrase the previous response to link his or her answer with a peer’s. Next, the student states whether he or she agrees or disagrees with the last response and explains why. In this way, students are listening to their peers and processing their answers as well as generating their own.

For example, a Social Studies teacher might pose a question about the morality of a first-world country abstaining from getting involved in a brutal war in a third-world country. After an initial response, the teacher might call on a second student. The student summarizes his peer’s answer by noting that she felt a first-world country has a responsibility to help put a stop to bloodshed, because human lives are worth more than the money it would cost to intervene. He would then continue by saying he disagrees with the previous answer because a first-world intervention might actually cause more bloodshed. The teacher would then call on a third student to continue the pattern.

5. Choral Response

Choral Response increases the rate of response simply because all students are answering a question in unison. Teachers should reserve this strategy for situations in which it is clear that the students are having trouble with specific information. For example, if students have trouble explaining a certain principle, the teacher would provide a brief explanation of the principle and then ask them

to repeat the explanation in a choral response. The intent of choral responses is not that all students are to learn content in a verbatim fashion, rather, the intent is to provide an “imprint” of the correct information.

6. Simultaneous Individual Response

While choral response invites participation from the entire class, it does not guarantee participation from each student, nor does it require any student to provide a response to a question; and while paired and chained responses increase response rates, they do not ensure the participation of the entire class. Simultaneous individual response employs a voting format, asking each student to select from a number of possible responses. By tracking both individual student responses and the overall responses of the entire class, a teacher receives valuable feedback. This feedback is both student specific (the teacher can gauge what each student does and does not understand) and class specific (the teacher is able to get an idea of how the entire class is progressing).

One idea for Simultaneous Individual Responses involves the use of *Response Cards*. To utilize response cards, the teacher must provide students with reusable materials such as a medium-sized whiteboard. Students use these boards to record their responses to teacher-posed questions. Typically, teachers compose short constructed-response items for the response cards. For example, a Social Studies teacher might ask, “What Abraham Lincoln document freed slaves in rebellion states during the Civil War?” Each student would record their answer on the whiteboard and show it to the teacher when prompted.

Or, teachers that have the SmartBoard response clickers can use them as Student Individual Response cards.